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Chutney and Indo-Trinidadian cultural identity

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Since the early 1980s Indian diasporic communities have attained sufficient size, affluence, self-awareness and generational distance from South Asia to have created a set of popular music styles that are autonomous and distinctive rather than strictly derivative of Indian models. While the bhangra music of British Punjabis has attracted some scholarly and journalistic attention, chutney, a syncretic Indo-Caribbean popular music and dance idiom, is little known outside its own milieu. This article constitutes a preliminary socio-musical study of chutney.

Chutney is a product of the East Indian communities of Guyana, Suriname, and especially Trinidad. Indians had originally immigrated to the region under a programme of indentured labour sponsored by British and, in Suriname, Dutch colonists from 1845 to 1917. Most of the immigrants came from the Bhojpuri-speaking regions of present day Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. While the first few generations of workers tended to remain in relatively insular and impoverished rural enclaves, in recent decades Indo-Caribbeans have come to participate much more actively in their countries' mainstream economic, political, and cultural lives. Partly by virtue of high birth rates, they have also come to constitute the largest ethnic group in each country: in Trinidad and Tobago, for example, East Indians slightly outnumber blacks at around 43 per cent of the population. Accordingly, East Indian society in each country has been in a state of dramatic transition.

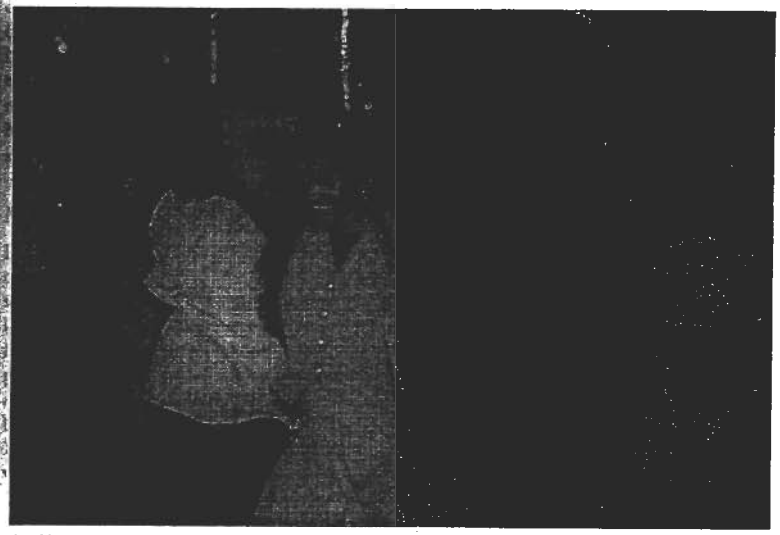
With the decline of traditions like caste and orthodox religion in Indo-Caribbean society, cultural entities like music and dance have come to assume unprecedented symbolic importance. Chutney is a case in point, enjoying a dramatic vogue in Trinidad since the mid-1980s and provoking a storm of controversy within the East Indian community. As a socio-cultural phenomenon, chutney is of interest in itself insofar as it has become a dynamic Indian diasporic art form and a prominent fixture of the Indo-Caribbean music and dance world. Perhaps more significant, however, are the ways in which the polemics provoked by chutney have exposed, focused, and articulated the Indo-Caribbean community's ongoing process of redefining its character and its relation to national culture, which has until recently been dominated by the more Westernised, predominantly Afro-Caribbean 'creole' community. In this article, I provide a descriptive overview of the chutney phenomenon and explore how it illuminates social dynamics relating to religion, gender, class, and ethnicity in contemporary Trinidad.

1. The 'classical' chutney ensemble (from left to right): dholak, dantal, harmonium and vocalist (Rooplal Girdharrie), and second dantal.

The evolution of chutney

Although the chutney vogue is a recent phenomenon, as a music and dance tradition it derives from the oldest stratum of folksong culture brought by the immigrants. This musical legacy comprised a variety of genres, such as wedding songs, birth songs (*sohar*), devotional Hindu *bhajans*, narrative *birha*, seasonal songs (*chowtal*, *hori*, *chaiti*), Urdu/Muslim *qawwali* and *qasida*, and idiosyncratic versions of Hindustani classical and light-classical genres which form the core of neo-traditional '*tan*-singing' or 'local classical music'.

Modern chutney derives primarily from a specific set of folksong sub-genres, all of which share the use of fast tempo, simple refrain–verse (in North India: *sthai-antara*) structure and light, erotic Bhojpuri texts. By the early twentieth century, if not sooner, the word 'chutney' (*chatni* – otherwise denoting the familiar condiment) had come to be an informal term denoting such songs.[1] The specific sub-genres, however, were varied. The core appears to have consisted of traditional folk songs and dances performed by women on specific life-cycle festivities in sexually segregated contexts. Particularly important is the *matticore* (matkor) ceremony occurring on the first night of a Hindu wedding weekend. On this occasion, women, accompanied by one or more males playing large *tassa* drums, proceed to the nearest water course in a nearby field and perform a 'digging-dirt' earth-propitiation ritual, burying a few flowers and bits of *sindur* (vermilion). With the drummers standing at a discreet distance and looking away, the women sing lewd songs and perform whimsically erotic dances, perhaps using an aubergine (eggplant) to imitate a phallus, or inserting a pillow in their blouse to look pregnant.[2] Similar singing and dancing by women may also occur on the festive 'cook-



2. Chutney dancers at a Hindu wedding.

ing night' preceding the wedding day, and immediately after the wedding itself. Women also sing ribald songs behind closed doors after the turmeric anointment of the bride, along with similarly erotic songs (e.g., *chatni sohar*) in private *chatthi* and *barhi* childbirth celebrations in which they would accompany themselves on dholak (drum) or by tapping two coins on a brass plate.[3] In some cases, a particularly knowledgeable woman might be informally hired to lead such song sessions. In melody, style, formal structure and text content, such traditional women's songs are clear antecedents of contemporary chutney song and dance.

Other precursors of modern chutney in Suriname and Guyana were folk song traditions associated with lower castes, such as *dhobi-ganiya* (washeromen's songs) and *chamar ganiya* (leather-workers' songs), and the related *gariyal* (Singh 1994, p. 231). Such songs, or others like them, were also occasionally performed by semi-professional male *tan*-singers, generally under the label *khemta* – in North India, a somewhat archaic term for a bouncy variant of *dadra tal* (metre) and, by extension, a song in that metre. (Thus, some *tan*-singers state that as a musical genre, chutney is merely a new name for *khemta*.) Various songs in other genres can be sung as chutneys if rendered with the proper tempo, melody and light character. Many Indian Bhojpuri 78s of *jhumars* dating from the 1950s are essentially identical to modern chutney. As vocalist Boodram Holass told me,

> You can sing all sorts of songs as chutney; you just put it in a fast road. Chutney is a mixture of all these things – you just put in the spices, the mango, and so on.[4]

Such potential eclecticism aside, the traditional folksong categories eventually subsumed as 'chutney' are generally amatory and often 'spicy', in the manner of Indian folk genres like *rasiya* (see Manuel 1993). Narsaloo Ramaya, a senior

authority on Indian music in Trinidad, cites a few typical lines from old chutney songs (in Ribeira 1992, p. 7):[5]

(1) *Bichiya mare kani angariya, jharo bedardi ho balama . . .*
A scorpion bit me on my finger, come soothe me . . .

(2) *Daiya mange batti aur batti mange tel*
ankhen mange nindiya jobanwa mange khail . . .
The lamp wants the wick and the wick wants the oil
The [man's] eyes want sleep but the breasts want fondling . . .

As spoken Hindi declined in Guyana and Trinidad, such songs often became creolised by the introduction of English words, thus overlapping with the growing category of predominantly English 'local' songs.

Dance is the focus of chutney and is an essential aspect of the folk genres from which it emerged. As indicated above, chutney-style dancing was done largely by lower-class women in the sexually segregated contexts of the wedding and *chatthi*. In Guyana and Suriname, stylistically similar male dance traditions also flourished. Guyanese men cultivated informal chutney-style dancing at rum-shops, where music would be provided, from the 1950s, by jukeboxes playing lively folk songs and certain up-tempo film songs. During wedding festivities, men would also dance in chutney style with each other, or with male transvestite dancers (*launda*). Lower-caste men such as *chamars* were particularly celebrated for their energetic and graceful dancing. As Guyanese dancer Gora Singh relates:

> The chamars, who used to live in tenement yards in the plantations, were famous for their *jhatke ki nach* ('jerky [hip] dancing'). This would happen especially the night before a wedding ceremony, where there would be so-called 'bottom house dancing', and the groom's party would push forward their best dancer, who had the best 'shots' or moves (personal communication).

In both weddings and rum-shops, skilled dancers were highly regarded, and groups of men would often place bets on their favourite dancers. The winner would be judged on the basis of informal consensus, whose disputation often provoked fights (Karna Singh, personal communication). One dancer related a typical anecdote:

> I was quite well-known as a dancer in those days [the 1960s], and some friends of mine, unbeknownst to me, had placed bets that I would outdance this other guy at an upcoming wedding. When the time came, the other fellow – who also didn't know about the bets his group had placed on him – watched me dance, and then came up and shook my hand and said I was so good that he wouldn't dance after me. My supporters then claimed the bet money, but the other group protested, and a huge fight broke out. They smashed up the whole wedding, and spilled out into the street, fighting for hours.

The chutney dance style, as cultivated in these contexts, had little in common with the acrobatic steps of the *birha* singer, the choreography in folk theatre like *Indersabha*, or the semi-classicised *rajdhar* dance formerly performed by Guyanese specialists with *tan*-singing.[6] Nor, for that matter, did the precursors of chutney dance incorporate much stylistic influence from Hindi films, which became increasingly popular in the 1950s. Rather, they rely on a fairly limited, although expressive set of standard movements, typically combining graceful hand and arm gestures with sensuous pelvic rotation – in Trinidadian parlance, 'wining'. Often, one hand is held behind the back and the other is upturned on top of the head, in a posture clearly deriving from Bhojpuri-region folk dance.[7] This basic set of stock moves

can be supplemented with a variety of improvised idiosyncratic or traditional patterns. To most Westerners and Afro-Caribbeans, the graceful hand gestures done by men as well as women might look effeminate, but they need not appear so to those familiar with the style. Indeed, similar hand movements are typical of male as well as female social dance styles everywhere from Indonesia through the Middle East to southern Spain, where virility and grace are not seen as incompatible.

Modern chutney

In terms of music and dance style, chutney is not, on the whole, original, but constitutes a revival and repackaging of the folk genres described above, some of which have otherwise declined in their traditional contexts. Thus, what is dramatically new about modern chutney is not its form but its flouting of the social inhibitions previously restricting dance, and its recontextualisation as a form of public culture enjoyed and performed by men and women together. Accordingly, as a socio-musical phenomenon, its emergence has been conditioned by the broader transformations taking place in Indo-Trinidadian society since around 1970. These processes, which have been discussed in detail elsewhere (e.g., Vertovec 1992) include: the ongoing process of creolisation, the concomitant decline of various ancestral traditions (such as caste, ritual and codes of female comportment), and lastly, the revival of interest in Indian culture, itself sparked by the Black Power movement, the increasing affluence of the Indian community, and other factors.

The loosening of social restrictions on dance occurred over a period of several decades. In the early twentieth century, a few Guyanese female dancers had started to perform *rajdhar* dance in public (Singh 1994, p. 228), and one Alice Jan earned local renown as a hired dancer at Trinidadian weddings. Although such women were generally regarded as socially unrespectable, their prominence helped loosen proscriptions for the next generation, including such women as Champa Devi, a flamboyant Trinidadian dancer of the mid-century decades. Equally important was the gradual relaxation of inhibitions regarding men and women dancing in the same space. Traditionally, a man who danced with women, e.g., at a wedding, would have been considered effeminate, while a woman who danced with men, whether at a wedding or a rum-shop, would be assumed to be of loose morals. In the 1960s and 1970s such inhibitions gradually loosened in Trinidad and, subsequently, in Guyana, as many Indo-Caribbean private weddings came to include animated chutney-style dancing performed by women and a few men – not necessarily in couples, but in the same space, in merry disregard of prior taboos. Typically, on the 'cooking night' of a Hindu wedding, one or more *tan*-singers would perform their somewhat serious music (*dhrupad*, *thumri*, *ghazal*, etc.) until 3 or 4 a.m., at which point, in response to popular demand, they would switch to chutney, and the dancing and merriment would begin in earnest; in recent years the chutney dancing has come to commence much earlier in the evening, or to entirely replace *tan*-singing.

The relaxation of restrictions on women dancing in the company of men no doubt reflects a degree of creole influence; this influence may have occurred more by osmosis than by direct contact, since most Indians have traditionally participated only marginally in core creole activities like calypso, Carnival, and soca

dancing. Indo-Caribbeans may have been influenced by the libertine dancing shown in Indian films (Gora Singh, personal communication), which, around the same time, was becoming popular in amateur competitions and other contexts, although not as a social dance *per se*.

The emergence of chutney as a public dance phenomenon can be dated from 1963, when local Trinidadian promoters Sham and Moean Mohammed organised a set of successful performances by a troupe of Surinamese singers (especially Drupati and Ramdeo Chaitoe) who specialised in fast, chutney-style songs. In the subsequent two decades, the Mohammed brothers (including radio personality and politician Kamal) further promoted chutney on Indian-oriented radio shows and public dances – both of which venues they came to dominate through their energetic entrepreneurship. One of their protegees, Sundar Popo, enjoyed great popularity from 1969 onwards with his light, chutney-style Hindi-English 'local' songs (like 'Nana+Nani') and his renditions of women's songs recollected from his childhood. The definitive public emergence of chutney, however, happened quite dramatically in the mid-1980s, when the weekend chutney dance-fetes sponsored by the Mohammeds became, for the first time, popular on a mass level, regularly attracting several hundred dancers – especially middle-aged women. Such women and their menfolk seem to have somewhat spontaneously and collectively decided that their dancing was simply too much fun to be restricted to the occasional wedding, not to mention sexually segregated contexts.

On a typical weekend in Trinidad, one or more large chutney dances are held, usually on Friday or Saturday nights or Sunday afternoons at venues like the Rienzi Complex in Couva, the Himalaya Club in Barataria and Samar Entertainment Centre in south Trinidad. The dances follow a standardised format. The first few hours are devoted to renditions of Hindi film songs by amateur singers backed by a house band playing electric guitars, synthesizers, traps, and other Western dance-band instruments. Between songs the MC urges people to drink and eulogises the singers as 'the Voice of Rafi' (a film singer) or 'a true imitator'. Despite the thunderous amplification, the steadily growing audiences generally pay only limited attention to the music, preferring to chat and sip beer and soft drinks.

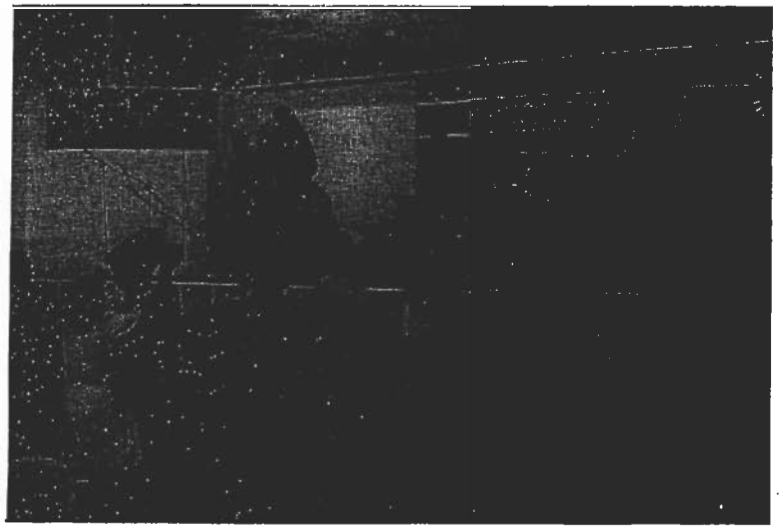
Eventually, however, the dance-band musicians depart and are replaced by the chutney ensemble, which traditionally consists of a solo male or female singer, with harmonium, dholak (barrel drum), and dantal (*dandtal* – a metal rod struck by a U-shaped clapper, derived from the Bhojpuri region). While the segue from the elaborate dance band to the humble-looking chutney group might seem anticlimactic, this is in fact the moment the audience has been waiting for. As the music starts, whoops and cheers arise from the crowd – now numbering three or four hundred – and several enthusiasts begin to dance, either moving to the aisles or pushing aside their folding metal chairs. Over the next few hours, three or four different chutney groups may perform, each doing sets of four or five songs. Often, the dance-band returns to accompany singers who prefer such backing and who have been able to rehearse with the band. For dancers, however, what is most important is a simple, catchy refrain sung in a strong, clear voice, and accompanied by the driving rhythm; if any chutney is intuitively perceived as deficient in these regards, the dancers retire to their seats *en masse* and resume chatting.

In recent years, the use of the dance-band accompaniment has become increasingly common. The dholak – otherwise considered a central feature of chutney – is often absent or inaudible in such ensembles, due to the difficulties of amplifying it to match the deafening volume of the other instruments. In its place, the basic rhythm is provided by a soca-type pattern rendered on a programmed drum machine; the genre as such is labelled 'chutney-soca', as opposed to the 'classical' chutney format of dholak, harmonium and dantal. The chutney-soca format is coming to be preferred in recordings and concerts, both because it is seen as more modern and because it can be amplified to such prodigious volumes.

As we have seen, chutney choreography itself is essentially an Indian folk style with a perhaps greater stress on pelvic rotation; however, the conventions surrounding it are a mixture of traditional Indian and contemporary creole. In some respects they appear to be a recontextualisation of Indian wedding dance customs. Thus, for example, like most non-professional wedding dancing in India, chutney is not primarily a couple dance. Instead, it is most commonly danced solo. Alternately, partners of either sex may dance together, 'wining' front to front, back to back, or front to back. Both in weddings and public fetes, most of the dancers are women. Male partners should not be assumed to be gay lovers, especially considering that restrictions against mixed-sex dancing had long since established traditions of same-sex dancing. Heterosexual couples, as often as not, consist of two dancers who informally come to gyrate near each other on the dance floor, and who typically part without ceremony or conversation. As one middle-aged woman told me, 'There is no question of it being vulgar; if a man comes up and dances with you, you just laugh and have fun, and then go your separate ways after the song ends.' As the dancing intensifies, a spirit of riotous fun often pervades and in some part de-sexualises the event. To some extent, the more 'lasciviously' a woman wines, the more she is likely to be laughing and looking at her female friends, as if to say, 'Isn't it outrageous?'

The contrasts with and similarities to creole dance conventions, and especially those of soca and Carnival (see Miller 1994, pp. 113ff.), are worth noting. On the one hand, chutney choreography exhibits little of the intimate, intensely sexual male–female embracing of, for example, reggae or hip-hop dancing. On the other hand, both chutney and soca dancing feature pronounced 'wining'. Uninhibited wining by creole women at Carnival and by Indian women in chutney fetes has provoked public controversy within their respective communities. However, in both chutney and soca, the fact that a man and woman dance together need not imply any expectation of a future personal rapport on their part; indeed, the impersonality of the situation and the absence of any sense of obligation to some extent facilitate the apparent suggestiveness of the dancing. Both chutney dancing and Carnival wining are most often done by women, whether solo or in couples or small groups of friends. As Miller notes, the perceivedly lewd wining of creole women at Carnival has been misinterpreted as lesbianism by some of its outraged critics, but it is better seen as a celebration of autosexuality or female sexuality *per se*, in a way that is not dependent on the presence of men (Miller 1994, pp. 123–4). Accordingly, as we shall note below, chutney's defenders have celebrated it as a form of female liberation.

The chutney dance style, with its combination of graceful/'effeminate' gestures and lusty wining, is well suited to be a vehicle for the expression of sensuality in a way that is not necessarily gendered. In this regard it is worth noting parenthetically that while male dance partners need not be assumed to be homosexual, the Trinidad chutney scene has opened up a space for a small but flamboyant gay subculture, which includes a popular semi-professional transvestite film-style



3. A public chutney-soca fete, featuring Rikki Jai.

dancer. As is to some extent the case in the USA, gay liberation has followed in the wake of female liberation.

Style, structure and commercial context

As a musical style, chutney is valued less for its intrinsic features than for its ability to accompany social dance and to express a distinctively local kind of Indianness. Chutney's style and structure reflect this character partly by their very adherence to stereotypical conventions. Chutney, like 'jam and wine' soca, functions as dance music rather than listening music, and its lyrics are accordingly of relatively little importance. If soca song texts are generally unimportant by virtue of their brevity and triviality, chutney lyrics are semantically insignificant because of their conventionality and, more obviously, because of the fact that they are sung in a language (Bhojpuri Hindi) which is largely unintelligible to most Indo-Trinidadians and Guyanese. The texts themselves derive from a number of sources. Some, as we have seen, are traditional folk songs, often learned by singers from older relatives or acquaintances. In other cases, singers compose their own lyrics, perhaps seeking the assistance of elders who have some command of Hindi. Whether new or old, the songs generally adhere to stock Indian folksong themes, such as portraying Krishna teasing the cowgirls, or the young wife complaining of her in-laws, pining for her absent husband or lover, or ambivalently relating an erotic encounter. Some chutneys, in the tradition of women's folksongs designed for sexually segregated contexts, are explicitly ribald. Contextual references are generally Indian rather than Caribbean. An example of this is a song composed by Boodram Holass, with the help of his Hindi-speaking parents, entitled 'Lucknow bajar

hamen jana hai' ('We must go to the Lucknow bazaar'). When I asked Holass why he chose Lucknow, rather than Delhi or, for that matter, Port of Spain, he replied that Lucknow has the biggest bazaar in India; it does not, of course, but in the Bhojpuri-speaking region in the nineteenth century, Lucknow's market would in fact have been the most renowned.

In accordance with their secondary importance, chutney texts are simple and repetitive, as opposed, for example, to word-oriented genres like calypso and narrative *birha*. If Indo-Trinidadians seldom understand the lyrics, they do intuitively recognise the formal structure, which carries its own musical momentum and flow. This structure generally consists of a refrain alternating with three or four verses (*antaras*), which often differ from one another only by the sequential replacement of one or two words. Thus, the 'Lucknow bajar' verses enumerate various objects to be purchased. Another typical example is the following:[8]

sthai: Ho more bhaja (sic – raja?), sipahi dar lagayia
antara: jab se sipahi sarakio men thari,
ho bhagat bhagat ham aiyo (ho more bhaja, sipahi dar . . .)
jab se sipahi anganva men thari
ho bhagat bhagat ham aiyo (ho more bhaja, sipahi dar . . .)
jab se sipahi mahaliyo men thari
ho bhagat bhagat ham aiyo (ho more bhaja, sipahi dar . . .)

sthai: O my prince (?), I'm afraid of the soldier
antara: When he came to my street, I ran away . . .
When he came into the courtyard, I ran away . . .
When he came into the house, I ran away.

Singers like Holass take pride in the song texts they have composed or recycled, and several vocalists I interviewed spoke with great enthusiasm about their songs' lyrics. However, as mentioned above, the texts are largely lost on audiences, few of whom know more than basic Hindi texicon, picked up from films, devotional *bhajan* sessions, and other contexts. Still, Indo-Trinidadians and Guyanese cherish and enjoy the usage of Hindi for its cultural resonance.[9] Inevitably, however, the use of English, or mixed English and Hindi, or even nonsense words is increasing, much to the scorn of traditionalists.

If chutney lyrics are semantically unimportant, the musical style and structure of chutney songs are also simple and stereotyped, again reflecting chutney's function as dance music. What is most important is that a song adhere to certain familiar conventions and meets certain basic criteria. Providing a fast, danceable rhythm is a primary requirement. Most chutneys are sung in the standard quadratic North Indian folk metre (called *kaherva* in that country). The dholak players, most of whom would be considered remarkably skilled in India itself, provide lively accompaniment, and are supplemented by the dantal, which is able to play fast rolls and damped or ringing tones. The emphasis, however, is on the animated singing, and the obligatory catchy refrain sung in a clear, strong voice. As in most forms of North Indian folksong, there is little vocal improvisation, and ornaments are used sparingly, strength of delivery being valued over delicacy. On the whole, aside from the flawed Hindi and the occasional English words, 'classical' chutney is essentially Bhojpuri folk music, and a chutney tape could comfortably occupy a place on a cassette vendor's shelf in rural Bihar alongside other recordings of local music.

Chutney's status as a music and dance event rather than a music genre *per se* is reflected in its economics. The chutney boom provides regular weekend work for the ten or so most popular singers, who include women as well as men.[10] Most of these, however, are semi-professionals, either working day jobs, or in the case of some of the women, being housewives. Some are also semi-professional *tan*-singers, who, whether liking chutney or not, accede to popular demand by singing it at weddings after a certain number of more classical items. A group may do up to five engagements per weekend, including weddings. Considerable money is generated by the shows, and especially by singing competitions sponsored by businesses. In February 1996, a 'National Chutney Monarch' contest offered awards roughly equivalent to those in the Calypso Monarch competition, including a car for the first-prize winner.

Since chutney's focus remains the network of weddings and live dances, its mass media dissemination has been relatively limited. Chutney receives some radio airplay on Trinidad's new, privately owned Indian-oriented stations. However, these stations devote most of their air time to Hindi film songs, cassettes of which also greatly outnumber chutney recordings. Nevertheless, the two dozen or so chutney cassettes released each year enjoy their own niche in the market, and are played as dance music at informal parties. Each of the leading singers generally records one cassette a year, the release of which is often timed to coincide with the Christmas season, which is a more important occasion for purchasing gifts than are the Indian festivals of Divali, Phagwa, or Hosay (Muharram). The cassettes are cheaply produced, often at the expense of the singer himself. Most cassettes sell around a thousand copies; producers regard as a hit any with sales exceeding five thousand. Cassette (and even CD) piracy dampens profits in Trinidad, and completely stifles local production in Guyana.

Chutney has now become an international genre in its own way, with New York City and Toronto emerging as appendages to the West Indian scene.[11] Top singers are routinely flown up to these cities for chutney extravaganzas. These fetes are attended primarily by immigrant Trinidadians and the more numerous Guyanese, with occasional handfuls of Asian Indians – generally young men hoping to meet women. Chutney is also the mainstay of a few small cassette companies located in New York, whose products are sold in Indian groceries for around two dollars each. Chutney-soca cassettes by the Bombay-based duo of Babla and Kanchan are even marketed in India itself. Most curious is the parallel chutney vogue among East Indians in South Africa (see Jackson 1991, pp. 179–81). Moean Mohammed (personal communication) claims to have sparked this vogue by exporting cassettes there, and a few Trinidadian singers have toured South Africa in recent years.

As an Indian diasporic art form, chutney invites comparison with bhangra, the lively dance and music idiom emerging in the early 1980s from the South Asian communities in Great Britain. Like chutney, bhangra consists of a modernised South Asian folksong form, reinterpreted and recontextualised as a social dance genre. As performed by Apache Indian, Bally Sagoo and others, bhangra has also syncretised with Afro-Caribbean music, particularly the dance-hall reggae popular among Jamaican immigrants who in many cases live and work alongside South Asians and share histories of colonial discrimination (see Manuel 1993, pp. 178–80; Sharma *et al.* 1996). In other respects the two genres differ. Bhangra draws from Punjabi rather than Bhojpuri folk traditions, and while its appeal extends to

Punjabi diaspora communities in Canada and elsewhere, only recently has it elicited interest among Indo-Caribbeans, who are largely outside the Punjabi sphere. Most bhangra is also less stereotypical and, if I may hazard a value judgement, musically more sophisticated than chutney; since bhangra may function as a listening music as well as dance music, producers like Bally Sagoo put more care, expense, and creativity into their recordings than do chutney producers.

Such considerations notwithstanding, it would be pointless to criticise or belittle chutney music for its simple and conventional lyrics, its highly stereotypical form, its unpretentious recordings, and the amateurish level of many of its singers. Chutney should be understood as a genre that has evolved with a particular set of musical, choreographic, and social features that enable it to occupy an important niche in contemporary Indo-Caribbean culture. Many Indo-Caribbeans also enjoy calypso and dance-hall reggae. Chutney and Hindi film music, however, have special cultural resonance as icons of Indianness. To some extent, Indo-Trinidadians are able to appropriate film music as local by means of amateur competitions (especially Mastana Bahar) in which they croon current hits or set their own imaginative choreographies to them. But with chutney, Indo-Caribbeans are able to celebrate their Indianness in a way which is perceived as distinctively local – especially since Indo-Caribbeans have little or no exposure to contemporary folk traditions in India. Chutney evolves from the particular Indo-Caribbean background of transplanted Bhojpuri regional culture. It transforms traditional folk dance into a modern social dance, without any of the artificiality of a self-conscious 'folk revival' sponsored by the cultural elite.

The contrasts with film dance are noteworthy and ironic. Dance scenes in Hindi films typically portray a libertine world of scantily clad women and men in Western dress gyrating animatedly together in cabarets and parties. Such scenes have little counterpart in South Asian reality, where sensual couple dancing scarcely exists outside of the night-clubs frequented by the rich. Only recently has disco-style film music come to be used in clubs as accompaniment for social dance. Indeed, it is chutney dancers, more than most South Asians, who realise Indian cinema's fantasy of uninhibited dancing. Such ironies are not lost on Indo-Caribbeans who encounter Asian Indians in clubs in New York City. Some South Asians look down on Indo-Caribbeans as deculturated outcastes who cannot even speak Hindi. For their part, however, many Indo-Caribbeans regard themselves, not entirely without justification, as being more in touch with heartland Indian culture than the Asians they meet most of whom are urbanised bourgeois professionals who have little interest in traditional Indian folk culture; not only are they unable to dance chutney, but most do not dance at all.

The chutney polemic

The Indo-Caribbean community, rather than being a monolithic entity, has always been divided by factions and controversies, and its collective notions of identity have been the subject of ongoing vigorous contestation and negotiation. The fact that the community has been in a state of dramatic socio-economic transition in recent decades has exacerbated such tensions. The polemic provoked by chutney, although cheerfully ignored by most fans, has been particularly vehement. On the whole, the controversy serves to concretise and expose otherwise more subtle and abstract issues of contention, reflecting the complexities and contradictions

involved in the current process of cultural reorientation – a process at once involving creolisation, Westernisation, celebration of Indianness, and female and proletarian liberation.

In 1990, in the wake of the chutney explosion of the preceding years, social conservatives and religious purists unleashed a barrage of indignant manifestos and proclamations. As enthusiasts rose to defend the art, newspapers, talk shows and other public and private forums came alive with animated and often vitriolic debate. In the words of one newspaper headline, 'Critics rage over chutney wine', referring, of course, not to a new beverage, but to the dance debate (Danny 1990b). The chutney controversy raged most intensely in late 1990, formalised in part by a conference on the subject sponsored by the Hindu Prachar Kendra in December of that year. Chutney critics were legion. Many letters to newspaper editors denounced the public fetes in apocalyptic terms; a typical correspondence called chutney 'the raping of a culture', and inveighed, 'Chutney shows promote lewd and vulgar dancing which inevitably leads to sexual promiscuity'.[12] A university student was widely quoted as linking chutney to wife-beating, alcoholism, illicit sex, the breakdown of family life and other evils (in Danny 1990d, p. 41). Organisations like the National Council of Indian Culture, the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS) and the Hindu Women's Organization (HWO) all denounced the lewd dancing, especially as accompanied by songs mentioning Hindu deities.[13] The HWO went so far as to issue a resolution calling on police to stop all wining at chutney fetes. The organisation's president, columnist Indrani Rampersad, expounded her views in several editorials in the *Trinidad Guardian*, denouncing chutney as 'vulgar, degrading, and obscene' (Rampersad 1990a, 1990b).

The arguments in the chutney polemic came to centre around a cluster of themes involving religion, gender, class and race – thus encompassing, indeed, the major parameters by which societies define themselves. Each of these merits individual attention.

Religion

The religion-based complaints against chutney have centred on arguments to the effect that it violates the spirit of Hinduism. Most criticisms have focused on the sensual wining, its alleged incompatibility with Hindu notions of honour and modesty, and its blasphemous character when performed to songs with devotional texts. Narsaloo Ramaya intoned against the female dancers: 'You have brought the names of the gods and goddesses into a vulgar and indecent performance and into a vile dust of ignominy and shame' (in Danny 1992). Hindu critics also pointed out that the leading promoters of chutney dances have been Muslim entrepreneurs (the Mohammed brothers) who have rigorously prohibited the singing of Muslim devotional lyrics at their fetes (see, e.g., Rampersad 1990a; Maraj 1990).

Chutney's defenders have countered such arguments partly by pointing to the tradition of sensuality and pleasure in Hinduism, and contrasting it with the alleged 'Victorian priggishness' and sterile dogmatism of the orthodox critics (Persad 1990; Orie 1990). While supporters such as Moean Mohammed (personal communication) have conceded that devotional *bhajans* should not be permitted during chutney shows, in many Hindu arts it is ultimately impossible to separate the spiritual and secular realms. Such dichotomisation is particularly impossible in the realm of folksong genres like *rasiya* (see Manuel 1993, ch. 9) or, indeed,

chutney, many of whose texts relate the amorous dalliance of the cowherd deity Krishna, who may or may not be mentioned by name. Accordingly, despite the agreement by certain cultural activists that devotional songs are inappropriate for chutney dances, songs about Krishna continue to abound, including the favourite 'Nand Baba'.

Since Hinduism is such an amorphous and heterogeneous religion, it is not difficult for advocates of any viewpoint to find precedents to justify their arguments. Conservatives can easily point to ideals of asceticism and female modesty, and to the almost complete absence of heterosexual couple-dance traditions in India. For their part, liberals can stress the hoary traditions of erotic Hindu poetry, sculpture, painting and dance – not to mention such phenomena as the association of prostitutes with certain Hindu temples, or for that matter, the lewdness portrayed in Hindi films. Modern Indo-Trinidadian society thus enjoys considerable latitude, subject to internal negotiation, in interpreting its sense of *dharma* or ethical code; Hindu tradition is clearly a 'constructed' one in this case. Fulminations of purists notwithstanding, the ongoing popularity of chutney has illustrated that liberals and secularists have won the day, with critics either marginalised or driven into disdainful silence. And while several *tan*-singers continue to lament how chutney is obliterating interest in their art, others have accepted the change, like Sampson Radhey, who remarked: 'It is a very normal thing for Indian singers to do both religious and "hot" numbers; this in no way takes away from the respect we have for the Hindu religion.'[14]

The chutney boom in Trinidad clearly reveals processes that have been elsewhere noted. These include, first of all, the decline of orthodox Hinduism and the institutions like the SDMS that promote it. This decline, however, should not be interpreted as a decline of Hinduism *per se*; chutney, for example, in its own way serves to popularise songs about Krishna and is one part of the lively resurgence of Hinduism and Indian culture taking place in Trinidad since 1970 (see Vertovec 1992, ch. 4). As with other aspects of Indo-Caribbean Hinduism, however, the form of its revitalisation is in many respects creolised, as reflected here in the essentially Western liberal practice of unrestricted social dancing in public arenas. That this liberalisation is primarily a matter of female behaviour adds another dimension to the debate, and merits further discussion in itself.

Gender

In traditional Indian and Indo-Caribbean society, as in most patriarchal cultures, social restrictions on expressions of sensuality apply primarily to women, not men. While men are more or less free to sing, dance, drink and socialise in public, it is women who are expected to maintain ideals of family honour and modesty. In Indo-Caribbean society, however, a variety of factors have undermined such traditions and combined to allow women more social freedom. Throughout the indentureship period, the fact that men greatly outnumbered women gave the latter a special desirability and, hence, bargaining power which many women were able to exploit to demand more equal treatment. Further, as ties to the ancestral homeland, with its rigid social conventions, grew more distant, Indo-Caribbeans became somewhat more creolised and relaxed in their attitudes towards female behaviour, especially in Trinidad, with its pervasive Carnival culture. Customs like dowry, arranged marriages, and Muslim purdah have greatly declined. Nevertheless, the

ideal of the family as an institution remains considerably stronger among Indo-Trinidadians than among creoles, and conceptions of proper feminine comportment remain accordingly more restrictive. Such conventions, however, are in flux, and the friction and heat generated by the transition are nowhere more dramatically illustrated than in the chutney polemic.

As we have seen, most chutney, as a dance and music genre, is new neither in style nor content; essentially, what is new is the social practice of women (and men) dancing in public. From one perspective, then, the controversial aspect is the fact that women themselves have spontaneously liberated their dancing from the confines of the domestic wedding or the all-female matticore, taking it, together with men, into the sphere of informal public culture. Accordingly, as mentioned, much of the purists' wrath provoked by chutney has been levelled at women. Narsaloo Ramaya, in his presentation at the HPK, eulogised respectable Indian women as 'the once flower of the race, the personification of virtue and chastity, the epitome of humility and uprightness'. Rhetorically addressing modern chutney dancers, he intoned:

> Even when you wanted to have some fun, you sang chutney songs and danced among yourselves with restraint within the bounds of decency . . . Now you have changed yourself into a diabolic form, dragging Indian music into disgrace and dishonour and yourself into degration (sic) and infamy . . . In this depravity you have bartered your soul. What a fall Indian womanhood got. (in Danny 1992, p. 7)

Indrani Rampersad of the HWO similarly focused her ire at women:

> At the average chutney function, it is the middle-aged woman who is more likely to be seen displaying unacceptable behaviour. There is a time and place for everything. So in breaking the taboos of gender, age and environment, these women are now breaking the law of the land by behaving as they do in public chutney shows. (Rampersad 1990a)

Evidently, however, a great mass of Indo-Trinidadian women seem to have spontaneously voted with their feet, hands, and hips against the notion that they alone must uphold standards of virtue and decency, while men have all the fun. Thus, a number of women and sympathetic men have defended chutney dancing not only as legitimate and healthy, but also as a vehicle and reflection of the overdue liberation of the Indo-Caribbean woman. At the HPK seminar in 1990, a Guyanese author asserted that female chutney dancing should be seen not as vulgar, but as a form of social protest against male control of women. Amidst heckling from the more orthodox members of the audience, he argued that the problem was not one of female misbehaviour, but of male insecurities and intolerance (in Danny 1990d). A Trinidadian woman, Rawida Baksh-Soodeen (1990), argued the feminist perspective more extensively in a newspaper article, worth quoting at some length; the traditional matticore dancing, she asserted:

> . . . is one of the spaces that were probably fought for centuries ago by Indian women to express their sexuality collectively within Hinduism, which is generally a male-dominant religion and culture.

Arguing that modern chutney is a 'positive development', she continued:

> I think it points to the growing emancipation of Indian women in this country which is linked partly to their advancement through education and the inroads they have made in the workplace, both of which have led to their economic independence. It is also related to the strength of the women's movement in this country . . . But to certain elements of Trinidad and Tobago Hindu society, this phenomenon represents the loss of control by the individual Hindu male and the male-dominated Hindu community over the sexuality of the Hindu woman . . . [Women's] dancing in public at the chutney festivals states emphatically that my body and sexuality belong to me, and nobody (not my man, father, brother, son, or the larger community) has the power to prevent my expression through dance.

Similarly, singer Ramraji Prabhu proclaimed, 'Chutney is modern and it is a liberation for women. We no longer have to hide behind doors to dance as we want.'[15]

The parallel with creole female wining at Carnival is remarkable (see Miller 1994, pp. 113ff.); indeed, both phenomena emerged as expressions of liberated female sensuality, provoking indignant protest, primarily from men. The similarities between the two controversies suggest an unusual and largely unacknowledged sort of affinity between the two communities.

Class

In Trinidadian popular, political and academic discourse, issues of socio-economic class are generally seen as secondary in importance to race (see Miller 1994, pp. 264–73). Nevertheless, whether publicly acknowledged or not, class divisions remain significant features of local life within the respective ethnic groups. As several commentators have noted, considerations of socio-economic class play a role in the chutney debate. Baksh-Soodeen, for example, writes of the opposition to chutney:

> What is also notable is that this hysteria is coming from the middle and upper classes of the Hindu community, who see themselves as the preservers of so-called authentic Hindu culture in this country. As has taken place throughout history, it is the lower classes who always lead the struggle for meaningful social change . . . Middle and upper class Indian women [i.e., the HWO] must not take the position of their men in what is clearly a movement by lower class Hindu women against male control, and toward greater personal and communal freedom since, ultimately, all Indian women in this society, whatever their class position, can only benefit from this development. (Baksh-Soodeen 1990)

Journalist Kamal Persad similarly noted that the HWO, rather than being representative of Indian women as a whole, is primarily an association of professional middle-class women (Persad 1990). The populist sympathies of another columnist, Phoolo Danny, were summed up in the pithy headline 'The people will wine!' (Danny 1990a).

Although in several societies the working classes may be in some ways socially more conservative than the bourgeoisie, the class formation of Indo-Trinidadian society has indeed been such that the lower classes have played a relatively dynamic and progressive role. Traditionally, the local Indian upper classes have fallen into two categories: one is the urban, Anglicised, 'Indo-Saxon' elite that has attempted to distance itself from all aspects of 'coolie culture'; the other comprises the conservative Hindus and neo-Brahmans who support the SDMS and religious and cultural orthodoxy in general. Neither section of this class has played a significant role in the maintenance and creation of Indo-Caribbean popular culture, from matticore dancing to chutney. Just as calypso, Carnival and steel drum are products largely of the lumpen subcultures of Laventille and Belmont, so has chutney emerged from the rustic traditions of rural Caroni and Penal, rather than the bourgeois Indian community of Port of Spain. In that sense, the chutney boom would appear to be yet one more instance of the familiar phenomenon of dynamic art forms emerging from the proletariat and only later becoming accepted by the social mainstream.

Race: chutney and creole culture

The various aspects of the chutney controversy thus far discussed have pertained primarily to the East Indian community's sense of identity in relation to its own traditional culture. An equally pressing, and ultimately inseparable question is that of the Indo-Trinidadians' relation to the predominantly Afro-Trinidadian creole culture. The chutney controversy has in its own way involved such broader issues, forcing Indians to confront, articulate and, in many cases, reorient their sense of identity *vis-à-vis* their country's so-called 'mainstream' culture.

The relationship between East Indians and creoles is complex and has been the subject of a vast and growing body of literature, some of which deals with socio-musical issues (e.g., Deosaran 1987; Constance 1991). Here, the most relevant aspects are the East Indians' concepts about the role that their own cultural forms play in national culture. On the whole, many Indo-Trinidadians have either chosen to feel or been made to feel that their culture is distinct from that of the creole mainstream. On the one hand, they have traditionally maintained their culture as an insular entity which provides social continuity, security and identity, while largely excluding creoles, whose culture is regarded with ambivalence. On the other hand, as Indians have come to participate more in their country's cultural mainstream, they want creoles to accept them in a spirit of pluralism as fellow Trinbagonians rather than dismissing them as immigrants. For their part, many Afro-Trinidadians feel ambivalent toward Indians, acknowledging the official discourse of multiculturalism while resenting the increasing economic, demographic and now political East Indian dominance. Within the Indian community, the chutney boom has dramatised the complexities and contradictions of ethnic relations in a particularly acute way, especially because it constitutes both a revival of Indian culture and an example of creolisation.

One aspect of the purists' outrage over chutney, aside from issues of religion, gender and class, is the perception that it incorporates the most objectionable features of Carnival and, implicitly, black popular culture – drinking, vulgar dancing and, as we have seen alleged, illicit sex and the subsequent breakdown of the family (e.g., in Danny 1990d, 1992). Chutney, in this view, represents yet another example of the erosion of lofty Indian cultural traditions from the influence of libertine Afro-Trinidadian manners. While such opinions may conflate with racism (or, in the preferred local term, 'racialism'), it is not possible to dismiss the widespread sentiment that creolisation has to some extent weakened traditional Indian values of thrift, industriousness and family solidarity (see, e.g., La Guerre 1994, p. 13). Chutney would constitute a prime example of such creolisation, and is accordingly celebrated or disparaged, depending on one's perspective.

Defenders of chutney's syncretism have been animated in part by the sensitivity of many Indians to the accusation that creole expressive culture is inherently more Trinidadian because its most celebrated products – calypso, Carnival and steel drum – were created in Trinidad; Indo-Trinidadian music, by contrast, has formerly consisted primarily of perpetuation or imitation of musics from India, whether folk music or film music. Thus, by extension, because blacks have created a new, syncretic local culture, they are the 'indigenous' people of Trinidad, while Indians are merely 'transients', as Prime Minister Eric Williams once called them.

Indian spokespersons have responded in two ways to this charge. First, they have called for a multicultural paradigm which would allow them to maintain their distinct heritage while at the same time being accepted as Trinidadians rather than immigrants. At the same time, they have tried to call attention to and actively encourage aspects of their culture that are distinctly local creations. Thus, defenders of chutney and chutney-soca like Moean Mohammad (in Elcock 1987) celebrate them as prime examples of the way that Indo-Trinidadians, rather than merely mimicking India, have planted their roots in Trinidad and created an original, syncretic art form.

A related defence of chutney is that for all its hybridity, it nevertheless serves to keep Indian culture alive and dynamic; several singers, including Ramraji Prabhu and Boodram Holass, stressed this point to me. As columnist Kamal Persad wrote:

> Chutney occasions represent Indian cultural continuity and persistence. Such is the strength of this Indian cultural expression that it is holding its own against competition from other musical forms emanating from other cultural streams like African calypso, reggae and dub, and even rock 'n' roll and pop music from the US. (Persad 1990)

Another columnist hypothesised, in reference to the 'bombardment' of Western pop music:

> Could it be that the Chutney phenomenon, the wining, is a sub-conscious emulation by the Indian people, their response to that bombardment? That out of a fear of cultural annihilation, they have begun to respond? That attack – wining – is the best form of defence? That rather than be swallowed up whole by the omnivorous reaches of the cultural imperialism of the West, the Chutney singers and dancers are now fighting fire with fire . . . that via the Chutney . . . Indians who might have strayed away in the past might once again return prodigally to the fold?[16]

Chutney thus can be seen forming a bulwark against commercial Western and creole culture partially by incorporating some of its features. While this situation is paradoxical, it is also a common and oft-noted feature of syncretic musics throughout the world. Music genres that remain frozen and 'pure' tend to become marginalised, while those that evolve and syncretise remain vital and are able to preserve at least some aspects of traditional culture.

Chutney-soca and Carnival

The years 1995–97 constituted a watershed of sorts in Trinidadian social history, marking the consolidation of the East Indian presence in national culture and politics and the institutionalisation of a new, explicitly pluralistic conception of national identity. Chutney-soca played a central symbolic role in this process. In February 1995, Black Stalin (an Afro-Trinidadian calypsonian) won the Calypso Monarch Prize with a whimsical song entitled 'Sundar Popo', dedicated to the veteran Indian crooner.[17] The following May, massive parades and festivities were organised to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first arrival of the indenturees (in 1845), and the government declared 30 May, 'Indian Arrival Day', to be a national holiday. A few months later, Basdeo Panday, leader of a predominantly Indian political party, was elected Prime Minister, becoming the first non-creole to occupy that post.

Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of the belated 'Indian arrival' on the national scene was the unprecedented prominence of chutney in the 1995–96 Carnival season. In December 1995, Scrunter (a creole calypsonian) won the soca-parang competition with a chutney-style tune ('Chutkaipang'). The following month, private impresarios staged a massive 'Chutney Monarch Competition', which drew crowds of over 15,000 people. The timing of the event and the offering of prizes as large as those of the Calypso Monarch awards effectively established chutney-soca as a fixture in the Carnival season.

Chutney also became a colourful part of the calypso/soca competition itself, as the 1995–96 crop of socas included several self-described 'chutney-socas' by creoles, including Marcia Miranda, Tony Ricardo, Chris Garcia, Brother Marvin, Luta and others, along with a 'bhangramuffin-chutney' dub song by General Grant; some of these singers even competed alongside Indians in the new chutney competition. As with Stalin's 'Sundar Popo', several of their songs were devoid of chutney stylistic features, but earned the name through their Indian themes. Indian soca-rock singer Rikki Jai also returned to the fold with a chutney cassette, whose most popular song instructed neophyte audiences to dance chutney-style by gracefully curling their hands in the air as if 'screw[ing] the lightbulb'. Chutney, indeed, had become a national fad, and for the first time, an Indian musical form was being widely enjoyed and even cultivated by creoles. Prime Minister Panday was moved to publicly hail chutney-soca as 'a symbol of the type of complete harmonization that must characterize our society in years to come'. The season concluded with Brother Marvin's 'Jihaaji bhai' (Shipmate), a thoughtful and melodious hymn to racial unity, winning second prize in the Calypso Monarch competition. (To the dismay of many, the first prize went to a mean-spirited and clannish song by CroCro castigating blacks for letting Panday win the 1995 elections.)

The exhilarating heights – and sobering limits – of chutney's popularity, and of Indian acceptance in the creole mainstream, were illustrated most dramatically by the fate of singer Sonny Mann in the Carnival season. Mann, a humble 61-year-old East Indian, had been a second-rank chutney and classical singer for several years. In the early 1990s he recorded a catchy but fairly typical chutney, 'Lotay La'. In the fickle chutney market, 'Lotay La' at first enjoyed only moderate success, but in mid-1995 it became a smash hit, breaking records for cassette sales and propelling the homely looking Mann to mini-stardom. During Carnival season the song's popularity was at its peak: a few steel bands adopted it as their 'road march' tune, several creole and Indian singers recorded renditions of it, and Mann won a car as first prize in the Chutney Monarch Competition. Buoyed by such pan-ethnic success, Mann entered the Soca Monarch Competition.

Mann was not without his detractors. Some conservative Indians were offended by his lyrics' reference to 'bhauji' (brother's wife) dancing lewdly, and afficionados noted his tendency to sing grossly out of tune. Moreover, after the Soca Monarch committee announced that Mann would not be able to compete since the tune 'Lotay La' was not new, Mann, perhaps injudiciously, intimidated the committee into relenting by threatening to sue. Mann's hope was not only to win the ultimate prize but also to convey a message of Afro-Indian unity by appearing on stage with creole singers Denise Belfon and General Grant. Unfortunately, upon walking on stage, he was pelted with cans and bottles by members of the overwhelmingly black audience, to jeers of 'We eh [ain't] want de coolie!'

4. Surinamese chutney and Indo-pop fusion singer Kries Ramkhelawan.

There was little he could do but mumble 'Thank you' and shuffle off teary eyed without singing a note.

The incident provoked prodigious commentary and debate in public and private forums over the following weeks. While few people openly defended the racial slurs that had been shouted, some questioned Mann's wisdom in bullying his way into the competition. Others pointed out that rowdy Trinidadian audiences have been known to pelt black as well as non-black singers in the past (including white calypsonian Denyse Plummer in 1983). One Afro-Trinidadian friend of mine voiced what may be a widespread sentiment:

> They shouldn't have called him 'coolie', but I would have booed him too. We like [Indian singers] Rikki Jai and Drupatee [Ramgoonai] when they sing soca, but Mann was singing chutney. Indians have their own competitions for chutney. I don't pay my money to hear songs in a language I don't understand. Soca is separate from chutney.

Such arguments notwithstanding, the fact that the audience's hostility was expressed in racist terms led a host of editorialists, community spokespersons, and others of both races to lament the evident persistence of an ugly undercurrent of bigotry in Trinidadian society.

In the following year's Carnival, such embarrassing incidents were avoided by replacing the Chutney Monarch Competition with a 'Chutney-Soca Monarch Competition'. On the one hand, this move effectively freed the soca competition from chutney performers like Mann, and further pushed chutney itself in the direction of soca. In both the competition and the related 'Spectacular Chutney-Soca Review Tent', formal Indianisms all but disappeared as English lyrics and soca style became the norm. On the other hand, the venues constituted sites for an unprecedent degree of creole and Indian joint participation, as around one

quarter of the audiences and nearly half the performers – perhaps attracted by the prizes – were non-Indians. As in previous instances, it was music and the discourse surrounding it that provided the clearest indication of the nature of ethnic relations in Trinidad. With chutney-soca, Indians had finally 'arrived' in the mainstream of Trinidadian culture, and on their own terms (however hybridised) rather than on the traditional creole turf of steel band and calypso. Chutney-soca has thus become an 'indigenous' art not only by being grudgingly accepted by blacks in the spirit of multiculturalism, but also by being actively enjoyed and even cultivated by creoles as well as Indians.

Conclusions

The chutney phenomenon has illustrated the way that popular culture can constitute a contested terrain where notions of social hegemony are symbolically negotiated and mediated. Given their inherently metaphorical nature, such processes are often covert, such that they are explicitly illuminated (or obfuscated) only by the interpretations of scholars. In the case of chutney, however, the contestation has been entirely explicit, providing a remarkably clear example of how a popular culture product can foreground issues of social identity.

One reason why the chutney boom has generated such public debate is its inherently contradictory and complex nature, encompassing, as it does, both creolisation and affirmation of Indianness. Another reason is the perception, by individuals with access to the mass media, that it constitutes a violation of orthodox values by traditionally dominated sectors of society – especially, lower-class women, who now openly assert their sensuality, and East Indians as a whole, who insist on their place in national culture. The Mann incident and the ongoing debate over the roles of chutney and chutney-soca in national culture illustrate that their place, and that of Indo-Caribbean culture in national identity are still being negotiated. The dramatic socio-musical developments of recent years have demonstrated the remarkable rapidity with which processes of creolisation and pluralisation are occurring. Indeed, many Trinidadians are already speaking of their country not as the proverbial 'land of steel band and calypso', but as the home of 'steel band, calypso and chutney'. In this sense, chutney has not only symbolised but also played a formative role in the emergence of a new social paradigm of multiculturalism.

Appendix: melody and mode in chutney

While most chutney melodies are stereotypical in their structure, they derive from a fairly diverse, although homogeneous set of Indo-Caribbean repertoires. Most are stock tunes, or variations thereupon, with new Hindi texts. Many derive from traditional Indian folk genres, while others are adaptations of Hindi-English 'local songs' from Trinidad or, in several cases, Guyana. A very few are taken from film songs (Ramraji Prabhu, personal communication), although it is significant that there is less of this sort of borrowing than occurs in many Indian folk genres.

Most chutneys use scales corresponding to the Western major or Mixolydian modes (Indian *Bilaval* and *Khamaj thats*); a few use the minor third degree and Phrygian-type modes (*Bhairvi*). Most are centred in the ambitus C–D–E–F (*sa re ga ma*). The cadential pattern G–A–G–F–E–D–C–b–C, as in Example 3, is extremely common in

chutney, as in traditional Bhojpuri genres like *jhumar*. Many songs can be seen as variants of the melody in Example 1 (or its 'minor' counterpart using Eb).

Example 1. Standard chutney melody.

The following three tunes can be grouped in the general family of the above tune. 'Bichiya mare' is the traditional folk song mentioned earlier in this article. The other two are among the most popular chutneys of today.

Example 2. 'Bichiya mare'.

Example 3. 'Nand Baba'.

Example 4. 'Bola Baba'.

The *antaras* are quite stereotypical, usually following the melody shown in Example 5.

Example 5. Standard antara.

Acknowledgements

This article is based primarily on field work conducted in Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname in several visits in 1993–96, the latter trips being funded by a PSC-CUNY grant. Aside from journalistic literature and Ribeira's useful work (1992), I have drawn heavily from interviews with informants. I am particularly indebted to such people as Narsaloo Ramaya, Moean Mohammed, Gora Singh, H. Mohabir, Fran Korom, Sam Boodram, Jameer Hosein, Praim Singh, Chandra Bollerup and especially to Mangal Patasar for his hospitality, friendship and the knowledge and insights he shared with me. I retain full responsibility for the contents of this article.

Endnotes

1. It is unclear if this usage derives from India; its occasional appearance on Bhojpuri folk music cassettes would suggest that it does.
2. Commentators regard such ribaldry as preparing the bride for her imminent sexual life and deflating some of the tension surrounding the wedding (Mangal Patasar, Krishna Persad, personal communication).
3. Arya gives texts for a Surinamese *sohar chatni* and a 'general' chutney of 1962 (1968, pp. 56, 160).
4. Personal communication, 1993. Many folk musicians in North India also use the term 'road' for 'style'.
5. Ramaya gave these examples at a seminar on chutney held at the Hindu Prachar Kendra in December 1990. The first song presumably continues with the scorpion biting in ever more intimate places, as is typical of such songs in India (see, e.g., Manuel 1993, p. 222).
6. Singh (1994) gives some further data on these genres, most of which are essentially extinct in the Caribbean, and, in their traditional forms, in India as well.
7. See Henry (1988, p. 196). Trinidadian music authority Mangal Patasar claims a loosely mimetic origin for this pose, deriving from the legend of Bhasm Asura, a demon who could turn to ash anyone whose head he touched. Eventually he was tricked into putting one hand behind his back and the other on top of his own head, thereby immolating himself. This pose, in combination with hip rotation, remains popular in chutney dancing.
8. This is a traditional folksong sung by Boodram Holass on *Golden Chutney Hit Songs 1993*. It closely resembles contemporary Indian folksongs like the *rasiya* I have quoted in Manuel (1993, p. 202).
9. Even if listeners were fluent in Hindi/Bhojpuri, their comprehension of chutney texts would be hindered by the often flawed pronunciation, syntax and grammar of the singers. Thus, for example, when I listened to some Trinidadian chutneys with a Hindi-speaking Surinamese singer, he shook his head and scoffed, 'I can't understand a word he's saying.'
10. The most popular chutney singers have been Anand Yankaran, Sonny Mann, Boodram Holass, Ramraji Prabhu, Sookraj Inder, Prematie Bheem, Polly Sookraj and Jairam Dindial, and, among *tan*-singers, Sam Boodram and Jameer Hussein. Typically, a singer is paid about US $230 ($1000 T&T, or local currency) per show, out of which they pay the three accompanists around US $20 apiece.
11. In Guyana, weddings may also feature chutney dancing, although public events are rare and generally feature visiting Trinidadian performers rather than locals.
12. In the *Trinidad Guardian*, 23 December 1990.
13. See, e.g., 'NCIC's view on chutney singing', a letter to the *Trinidad Guardian*, 15 December 1990.
14. In *Sunday Punch*, 4 June 1989.
15. In *Sunday Punch*, 17 December 1995.
16. L. Siddhartha Orie, letter to the *Trinidad Express*, 30 December 1990.
17. The song, although neither in chutney style nor in Hindi, was described as a 'chutney-soca' because of its theme. The lyrics portrayed Stalin pestering Popo to deliver a song that he had long ago promised; in the touching conclusion of the song's final stage performance, Popo himself came on stage, waving some sheet music in his hand, and embraced Stalin.

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